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Lodge Being Blamed for Crisis In Viet Nam; He Is Said to Have Agreed to Dismissal of Gen. Thi

Ambassador Took Calculated Risk, Reportedly Received Faulty Intelligence From Own Staff and CIA

By RICHARD DUDMAN

A Staff Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch

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AMBASSADOR HENRY CABOT LODGE is being blamed for a serious political blunder that set off the current political crisis—the firing of Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi.

There are mitigating circumstances. Antigovernment demonstrations already had been planned, and this ouster merely provided an unexpected excuse. Also, Premier Nguyen Cao Ky is said to have done the job ineptly, sending Thi back to his stronghold in Hue instead of putting him out of action.

Nonetheless, Lodge acquiesced in a calculated risk that turned out to have been badly miscalculated.

The facts are these, sources here report:

LODGE, like his predecessor, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, had little use for Thi. Both considered him to be overly ambitious and a troublemaker.

A different view of the young general was held by many Americans who had watched him at closer range at his headquarters in Da Nang as commander of the Viet Nameese First Corps and at his home at Hue.

They recognized Thi as a popular leader, a brave, capable commander and a figure able to hold the respect of the strong Buddhist organization centered at the University of Hue. They emphasized his reputation for acting in accordance with his beliefs.

When others were merely talking against the dictatorship of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1960, Thi lead an attempted coup. He fled to Cambodia when Diem outmaneuvered the rebel forces. Thi remained in exile three years.

TO SOME, Thi seemed to be a potential Ramon Magsaysay, the magnetic Filipino who led his country to victory over the Huk-balahap insurgency. Most recognized, however, that Thi never would be acceptable to Catholics or southerners in faction-ridden South Viet Nam.

American sources seemed to agree that Thi was harsh and impulsive. Last year Thi threw three Viet Cong prisoners out of a helicopter when they resisted interrogation. He often gestures with a pointed forefinger and

cocked thumb to show that he He acted as a warlord in his domain of Da Nang and Hue, sometimes refusing to recognize orders from Saigon and dismissing civilian officials appointed by the central government.

THE HONOLULU conference aggrandized Premier Ky and, observers think, deepened the rivalry of Gen. Thi's part.

When Ky went to Da Nang after the Honolulu meeting for a conference with leaders there, Thi is said to have made scornful remarks such as, "We don't have to listen to the little man with the moustache from Saigon."

The Honolulu meeting is thought to have given Ky the impression that he was strong enough to dispose of Thi at last.

At the American Embassy, the political section is understood to have advised Lodge that the ouster could be handled without serious repercussions. The Central Intelligence Agency is said to have given similar advice as well as a warning that Communists were responsible for part of the trouble with Thi, a view not widely shared.

KY SPOKE with Lodge before firing Thi as First Corps commander and as a member of the 10-man ruling "directory." Lodge did not advise against the move.

The two men had a long discussion in which Lodge is said to have gone over the advantages and disadvantages and avoided any recommendation of his own.

What went unrecognized was that the Buddhist leaders could use the move as an occasion for demonstrations against the military government.

More important, Thi was regarded as an individual troublemaker rather than a popular figure expressing resentment of his entire region against the government in Saigon. The feeling had been growing that the First Corps was doing most of the fighting and paying heavy taxes, yet was being treated like a stepchild by Saigon.

SOME OBSERVERS point out that the South Viet Nameese more than the Americans should have been aware of the regional splits and animosities.

Now another general from the same region, Ton That Dinh, has been named First Corps commander, apparently, with concurrence of the Buddhist leaders.

Thi no longer is an issue, but the political crisis touched off by the move is strong, with no end in sight.

his commander, Lodge, H.C.

*CIA-03 Vietnam
Thi, Nguyen Chanh*